

Playing second innings online: an ethnographic study on the Internet Usage among the urban Indian middle class senior citizens of Hyderabad, India

Mannar Indira Srinivasan,

Hyderabad, India.

Email: mannar.indira@gmail.com

Abstract

India communicated for centuries by word of mouth, giving precedence to face to face communication, as majority Indians still live in villages. The economic boom, surge in its GDP PP, and the explosion in the fields of information and communication technologies have revolutionized the way the Indians are interacting at work and leisure today. With the rise in the standard of living, and PPP, the life expectancy levels of people have raised, making India the second largest home in the world for 86 million people in the age of 60+ by 2011. As per the UN estimations, 20% of its population turns 60+ by 2050. Erasing the traditional image of the elderly persons that stayed away from the techno world, a growing number of Indian senior citizens are keen in embracing the modern communication technologies like PC, smart phones, popular search engines and the World Wide Web. Following ethnography, in-depth interviews and participation observation at Hyderabad, the joint capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana states, the researcher would like to paint the images of the upper middle class, urban Indian senior citizens online.

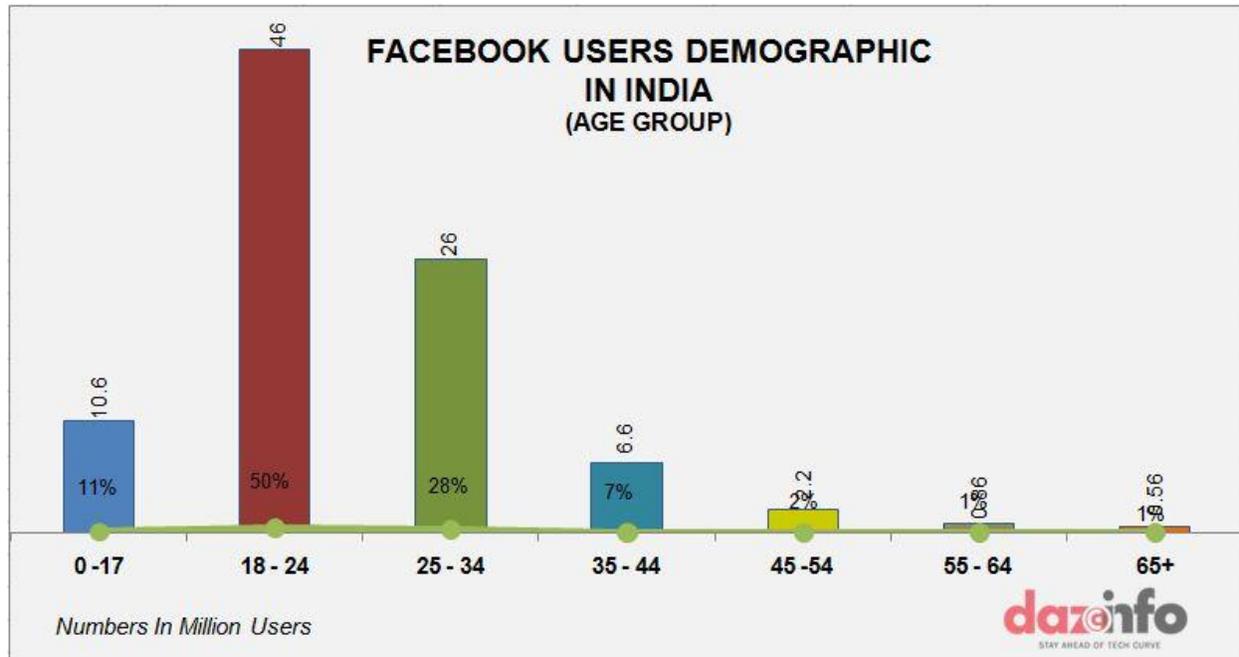
Key words: The Internet, Social Media Network, Senior citizens, Urban Indian , Middle Class Senior citizens

Introduction

Revolution in the field of Information and Communication technologies have opened up wide opportunities to a cross section of population across the globe by surpassing time, space, literary (voice based communication) and income (Affordable technologies) barriers. People, irrespective of socio, economic, age, gender, and educational backgrounds could embrace these technologies with ease, as they could fulfill economic, information, psychological and emotional needs of students, aged, women and individuals in different professions by providing easy and user friendly solutions to many complex problems. Online education, health, money transfer, bill payments, entertainment are only few to be

mentioned here, as it is not an exaggeration to state that ICTs have become ubiquitous during the 21st century. Despite challenges like technology penetration, computer literacy, and language that dominate the web communication, aged persons across the globe are embracing these technologies with awe as Internet, smart mobile phones, and the computer mediated communication could come to their rescue, given the age related physical, psychological and financial issues they acquire due to retirement, ill health and the other age related issues. Contrary to the popular belief that the younger generations that are born and nurtured in ICTS alone are using them, computer mediated communication is gradually picking up even among the senior citizens in USA and Western Europe. A considerable amount of senior citizens in USA compared to the past have taken to this new media, as it is serving their multiple needs (Zickuhr, 2014 & Juznic et al, 2006). Their attitude towards acquiring new technologies is favorable and senior citizens are learning to operate and navigate on their own (Eastman et al, 2004). Studies have even proved that they are ready to take special courses to learn computers if it is afford to them at convenient locations. Loges et al, 2001 have even proved that the existing digital divide between the younger and the older is not due to the generation gap or lack of access. It is rather psychological and emotional and senior citizen's adoption to the Internet depends on the variety of tendencies like type of goals they want to pursue online and the intensity of relationship they build with the Internet. Depending upon the level of education, affordability, and the computer literacy, senior citizens are acknowledging new media and social media networks as central to their lives. However, experiences and perception of the senior citizens of the developing world toward the Internet and social media is not documented to the extent it is expected and this is particularly missing in the case of Indian senior citizens. The present study tries to document the Internet experiences of urban middle class senior citizens of Hyderabad. As per the census 2001, there were 77 million elderly populations in India and their numbers have swelled up to 86 million by 2011. People aged 60 and above accounted for 6.7 percent of the population during 1991 and it is expected to be 10 percent by 2021 (Census, 2011) and 20 percent of the Indian population may turn grey by 2050 as per the UN projections. There is no universally acceptable definition for the term old age, as it may vary from region to region. The developed world is considering 65 years as the age for retirement and eligible for pension while the developing world acknowledges attainment of 60 years as old age. In Africa, elderliness is attributed by attaining 55 years. It is more of a biological phenomena accompanied by certain set of features like hairs turning grey, losing physical fitness, accompanied by certain ailments, including, loss of sight and hearing. In the less developed nations of Sub-Sahara Africa and Asia majority in the rural areas work in informal agrarian sector beyond sixty years. In India, the socially constructed meaning for the old age is, being free from the family responsibilities like children's education, marriages, attaining grandchildren etc. WHO considers 60+ years as the criterion to refer the population as old aged. (WHO, 2001). Family as an institution has provided shelter for aged, sick,

widows, destitute, children and orphans for centuries in the developing nations of Asia and Africa. With the modernization, urbanization and globalization, family has lost its relevance, as rural urban migration has deserted the villages in many parts of India. According to Census 2011, 68.84 percent of population is living in rural India and 31.16 percent are living in urban centers. The urban population rose from 27.81 percent in 2001 to 31.16 percent by 2011. The average rural household size declined steadily in the lowest monthly per capita consumer expenditure class from 6.2 members to 3.8. This figure is even high in the urban areas that witnessed a decline from 6.6 to 2.9. The average number of under-15 members per rural household also declined from 3.1 in the lowest MPCE class and 0.8 in the highest class. Many old age people are living alone, coping with their age related physical and psychological issues that often subject them to stress, fear, insecurity and exploitation. When we look at the aspects like literacy levels and internet accessibility for the senior citizens in India, only 50 percent of men and 20 percent of women aged 60 and above are literate (GOI, 2011) through formal schooling and 13 percent of the population (out of 1.2 billion people) has internet connectivity (IBF, 2008). Only 3 percent of the rural India is connected online and the Internet connectivity is an urban phenomenon in India and its accessibility is restricted to a mere 5 percent of English literates, leaving a vast section of population out of the benefits of ICT revolution. Majority Internet users (85 percent) in India are in the age group of 18-40 and only 15 percent of the population in 60+ age group use internet in the country. Again, more men (85 percent) than women are computer savvy and 11 percent of working women against 2 percent of house wives are using the Internet for various purposes (Sreekumar, 2008). Facebook is the leading social network site in India with 102 million active users by 2014. According to the Facebook India statistics, amongst the 7 major metropolitan cities, Delhi leads the race with 39 percent of users followed by the other Metro cities. The south Indian city Hyderabad shares the fourth place along with Chennai with 8 percent of Facebook users. As per the Facebook India statistics, only one percent of the population that is in the age group of 60+ in India is using social media networks for communication.



1. Source:<http://dazeinfo.com/2014/01/07/facebook-inc-fb-india-demographic-users-2014/>

Salient features of Internet usage in India

Although the Internet connectivity is centered on the major Indian metropolitan cities, 60 percent of the social networking traffic is coming from the towns and semi urban centers. While the young users of the Internet are dominating the popular network communities like Facebook, elderly people are making the best use of professional sites like LinkedIn. The Internet remained a male dominated sphere in India in the ratio of 80:20. Majority social network site users in India are from the middle income households with an annual income of less than Rs. 2 lakhs. More than 45% users visit the social network sites everyday in the morning and are re-visiting them thrice during the day (Shah, 2011) and the Facebook dominates all the other social network groups. Although internet is used for conventional mailing and chatting in the beginning, online interactive games and photo sharing are the most popular features of the present day Internet usage in India. Only 5 percent of the Indians are active online, as English is dominating most of the sites as medium of communication. The social networking sites may grow further if the social networking sites are available in the regional languages also (Simply 360°, 2011). 60 percent of the internet users in India are not corporate entities, but they are ordinary citizens, operating from their homes or cyber cafes. Blogging, online activism and the recruitments are the other uses, for which the Internet communities are used extensively. Popularity for the social media networks has been on rise and 84 percent of the internet users in India are adapting to it accounting to 110 million Social Network site users

in India. They are visiting the sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube Pinterest, Tumblr, Four square etc. There are 112 million Facebook users in India by 2014, which is the second largest country in the world after USA with 123.1 million users and 90 percent of the Indian users are accessing this site through mobiles (estatindia, 2014).

Review of literature

Virtual cultural practices of the aged persons are not well explored so far from the Indian context. Although the presence of younger generations in the age of 18-40 is dominating the virtual sphere, an increasing number of senior citizens across the globe are making their presence as per the survey of Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project 2012 (Raine, 2012). Unlike the younger generation, the older generation is not using the internet for socialization and entertainment extensively. They are mostly using it for extracting information; shopping and mailing. 74 percent of the users in the 60+ age group in USA are using the Internet for mailing, followed by searching information on health. They are also using it extensively for banking operations. Online banking activities grew from 37 percent in 2005 to 57 percent in 2008. Eastman et al (2004) discussed the use of the Internet among the elderly consumers by studying aspects like attitude, innovation, and demographics of internet use. This study shows that elderly consumers have favorable intentions towards the Internet; most of them have learned to use the Internet on their own and they prefer to learn more about the Internet if such classes were offered at convenient locations. Those seniors with higher levels of income are more willing to use the Internet for online shopping. Kanayama (2003) explored the online experience of elderly people in Japan on how they interact with others and construct social relationships via computer mediated communication. Following Ethnography the researcher discussed about the way the elderly people enjoy interaction in a variety of language forms, ranging from haiku to emotions, by combining traditional text-based Japanese culture with a new virtual culture, despite the limitations of text-based communication. The study concluded that the immediacy and asynchrony of computer mediated communication helped them in constructing real-time human relations through virtual community. It allowed them to stay socially connected with others and helped them in developing supportive companionship. The elderly people could create a sense of greater proximity by sharing their old stories and memories using virtual platforms. Cohena et al (2004) showed the way the computer networking is increasingly important and crucial for the senior citizens of Israel. This inquiry considered the nature and meaning of elder's participation in the cyberspace and the degree to which computer-mediated communication increases the social capital of the older adults. The study compared 10 elderly computer participants with 10 nonparticipants using open-ended interviews. Three primary themes have emerged from the interviews. The study discussed how the virtual world can be a potential arena for the production of social capital of older adults. Participation in the cyberspace allowed elderly persons to develop social ties. They could strengthen the flow of information and enhance

the norms of reciprocity through computer mediated networks. The Internet allowed the elderly people to connect and build networks with similar as well as diverse individuals.

Although there are several stereotypic projections of elderly people, painting them as prejudiced, outdated, withdrawn, and lacks interest in the worldly affairs the number of senior citizens in the cyber sphere is constantly on rise. The American seniors are increasingly going online. Older adults of U.S. are flocking to the websites increasingly as per the research by the American Association of Retired Persons. Senior citizens are the fastest-growing segment of the Internet community, expanding at an annual rate of 16% (Knechte G.R, 2002).

Mukarjee (2011) traces the reasons that limit the internet usages among the older people in India. According to him, the ICT usage in India is an urban phenomenon with 12 percent of users living in towns and cities. Only 1.2 percent of the rural elderly folks have access to the Internet and other ICT enabled technologies. Only educated and socioeconomic upwardly mobile class alone is proficient in ICT usages in India and the rural India is lagging behind the other Asian and Asia Pacific neighbors. Although structural reforms have liberalized the industrial scenario in the country, its outdated service regulations are proving dearer. Crippled with excessive bureaucratic interventions, the internet penetration levels remained poor in India. Traditionally aged population that are dependents on others gets least priority in getting access to the Internet, limiting its potential benefits to this section of people. According to the Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 15 percent of the senior citizens access the internet from cyber cafes, and 81 percent of them are using the Internet for more than five hours a week. 62 percent of them using it for news online and 2 percent read news on their mobile. About 26 percent of them look for stock quotes and engage in trading, 38 percent of senior citizens are using the internet for online banking services and 21 percent for online shopping (IAMAI & IMRB, 2013).

Research methodology:

Ethnography, participant observation and in-depth interview technique has been used to collect data for this study. Although the researcher has consulted several senior citizens as a part of this study, the researcher could pick 15 senior citizens in the age group of 60-75 as key informants to understand the virtual cultures of the senior citizens who are residents of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, India, as the study involves participatory observation to document the online and offline behaviour of the senior citizens, The researcher had to select the key informants that are willing to allow the researcher as online/offline observer of their Internet activities for this study. The researcher also used an open ended questionnaire to collect data through personal interviews for this study.

Brief Introduction about Hyderabad

Hyderabad is the joint capital city of the two South Indian states namely Andhra Pradesh and Terengganu. It is a historically renowned city that emerged as pharmaceutical and software hub of India during late 1990s. Hyderabad and Secunderabad are called Twin cities, as the Hussein Sager Lake, also called as 'Tank bund', connects these two parts of the city. While Hyderabad, (also known as Old city) is known for its Islamic culture, with its beautiful minarets of Nizam architectural marvels, Secunderabad was under the British control until independence (1947) and is home for a cosmopolitan urban culture. The researcher has selected Padmarao Nagar, Sainikpuri, Uppal and the Kukatpally (all of them are close to the railway station) of the Secunderabad area, where the upper middle class, urban families with access to computers, connected to broadband are living.

The Respondents

67 percent (10 out of 15 respondents) of the respondents are female and 33 percent of male senior adults have participated in this study. 50 percent of the respondents have their children settled in USA, Middle East or UK; the modern communication gadgets are affordable to them due to regular remittances, without which they would not have been using it. 40 percent of the male respondents have worked and retired from the central government service, while 60 percent of them are from the private service, still continuing their jobs. 50 percent of the female respondents have retired from the services and have completed bachelor's degree or Post graduate education, while 50 percent of the female respondents are housewives with primary and secondary school pass outs. While 50 percent of the male respondents have proficiency in English, only 50% of the female respondents are proficient in English. Almost all the male respondents are extensive computer users with advanced knowledge to use all features of the internet and computers and women respondents are not computer savvy and are confining themselves to the limited online usage. Almost all the respondents possess computers connected to broadband services at home and they are not relying on the internet cafes. All the respondents are economically affluent with a family income of Rs. 50,000 and above per month and they own houses, landline phones, mobile connections, vehicles (two wheelers and cars) and the other electronic and electric devices. They belong to economically upward communities with their children and grand children studying in English medium convents. The average family size of the respondents is four, with elderly couple either living alone in the absence of their children that have migrated abroad, in search of employment or those that might have moved away from home towns due to children's education and employment within the country, but away from the parents. 20 percent of the respondents are living with their grownup children and they are enjoying their support. Male respondents are using the internet for mailing, extracting information, networking and making friendships and women are primarily using it to extend and strengthen relationships within the family members and to balance their emotional and psychological needs.

Ethnographic research findings:

Until recently, PL (60) that worked for Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board (APSEB) was aware of telephonic (Landline) and face to face interaction only as she lived in a close knit family circle of three daughters. She lost her husband when she was 45 and relied heavily on her daughters for psychological and emotional support. By late twentieth century, she could marry her daughters off and today, she is alone in her early sixties, nearing her retirement. She is financially free and independent in every aspect. She need not stretch her muscles on the never ending domestic chores. She enjoys enormous freedom to visit places, relax and find some space for herself. She is in regular touch with two of her daughters (the eldest and the youngest) that live in India through phone and she visits them at least once in a month's time. She turns nostalgic only when the image of her younger daughter that lives in USA crosses her mind. With the advancements in the information and communication technologies, she could call her two granddaughters that are attending schools at New York. She could watch their videos posted on her Facebook pages. She calls them for a 'Skype' chat and interacts with them during weekends, as she owns a personal computer at home. She advices them, councils them and shares a lot of personal information. Mrs. PL is not alone in this race and the 'Virtual sphere' is emerging as a second home for many seniors, whose numbers has been on rise constantly. SD (74), for example is a woman of third grade pass out. Although she is able to follow many English words, as she could see all her four children completing their Master's degree, she did not possesses enough English and computer proficiency to use the internet on her own. She is a widow, living with her youngest son at Padmarao Nagar, Hyderabad. She married off her all four children that are settled in different parts of India and abroad. On twenty fourth October, 2014 the researcher was at. SD's house at Padmarao Nagar and the respondent was cleaning vegetables. Her youngest grandson from the other room screamed suddenly at her "Granny, hurry up! Brother Abhi (her eldest grandson, son of her eldest son) is here. Mrs. SD however was not surprised to these announcements, as she is aware that her eldest grandson is working as a senior associate at a reputed bank in USA and he is not touring India at present. She gathered strength to get close to her 14 year old youngest grandson that is messaging on the Facebook. The boy entered an online chat with his cousin at New Jersey, while SD was giving inputs to the one operating the computers. Connected to the broadband the boy on the other side could share the information that his little finger was hurt while chopping vegetables the previous evening and he has applied some medicine. The granny offered online suggestions, while talking to him via net phone, with ear phones connected. They could exchange 'Dewaali' (One of the major festivals of India) greetings and many more. SD shared the information that she collected in the morning from her grandson at USA with her eldest son (Abhi's father) living in Canada that evening and have confirmed that the parents have called the boy living at New Jersey and

they are aware of the injury. Right from seasonal changes like monsoon showers, local politics, agitations, films and family issues, SD shares everything with her eldest son that participate in online chatting/live discussion every Sunday from Canada. She shares information on marriages, deaths, child births, promotions, job transfers, gardening and a whole lot of things week after week with her son and the grandson with the help of her youngest son, daughter in law or the youngest grandson, with whom she is living at present in Hyderabad. She is unable to operate the computer on her own. She explores it thoroughly with the help of the other family members and she is relieved once the information at her disposal is transferred after the hour long talk/chat/live discussion. She could see the video pictures of newly constructed house of her eldest son at Canada, shares photographs of her grandson at New Jersey and could exchange information, photos, videos and many more from India, where her other three children are living. Week after the other, her eldest son collects the entire family information from her, while passing the information at his end. She has objections on aspects like her grandson posing for photographs with his girl friend. She expresses her apprehensions about his marriage that he may not marry an Indian girl of their caste and region.

“I am not happy with my eldest son when he revealed his plans to migrate to Canada. I cried for several days and months. Thanks to these sharing sites, I am able to stay in touch with them. I am aware that they are able to visit me only once in two years. I shall wait for Sundays so that I shall be able to talk to them. I have lost my husband 10 years ago. My children are my asset. I have worked really hard to see all my children (4 of them) well educated. I am happy that they are all well settled.”

Like SD, two other female respondents in their 60 + are using the network communities. Though they are not proficient in English and unable to operate computers, they are able to share even minute details of their family members with the help of popular network communities like Facebook. In fact, these two respondents are also frequently travelling to USA or Europe, where their children are employed. “I have an agreement with our children living overseas” explained. SK that lives in Uppal area of Secunderabad. She possesses VISA to stay in USA only for six months. She spends her time with her children abroad during summer and returns to India during winter, as she is unable to cope with the severe winter there. She travels to UK for a week halt, where her youngest daughter lives and proceeds to her elder daughter that lives in USA. “My husband used to worry that we did not inherit male children. Today, my daughters are Non Resident Indians (NRI), a status that makes me proud. So far I have visited these nations several times on my own without any attendants. I am not English literate. Yet, I shall take the help of my fellow passengers or I shall approach the help desk at the airports for help” she explained. Her children visit their home land only during vacations and spend some time with their mother (at least for four weeks) in a given year. SK lives all alone in India and she is acting as a caretaker of her children’s (two daughters) assets like house rents, repairs, property management etc. She takes important decisions

after consulting her children abroad and she is capable of extracting help or services from her neighbors, relatives and servants.

“I have visited my youngest daughter recently, as she delivered her second child. I was with her for six months. I miss the newborn baby and at times I feel frustrated for not been able to live with my children. However, I am not keen in leaving India for good as it is boring to stay alone over there. I can chitchat with my neighbours here. I can visit the nearest temple and observe all important occasions like pasts and feasts as prescribed in our Hindu calendar. I can fulfill my desires like observing the progress my grandchildren (The newborn) through Facebook. I have a PC at home. As you can see, I shall take the help of tenants at my house, who are college going students. I can interact with my daughter that regularly posts the beautiful pictures of my granddaughter”, she explained.

SK is enjoying the pension of her husband that worked as Chief Engineer at their district head quarters. He died four years ago due to ill health. She was aware that she had to live in isolation after his death.

“I am fighting with this loneliness by keeping myself preoccupied with several tasks. I stay in regular touch with all my friends, relatives and neighbours and exchange information. My daughter (the youngest) insists that I should pass on the gifts, goodies like chocolates within my circle whenever she visits India. In return, I have accumulated valuable social capital, helpful in combating stress. I am relying on online network sites for communication and exchange of information with my children.”

She does not rely on the conventional mailing, searching information and browsing the net for information. She is able to watch the photographs posted on her Facebook pages and relies on voice based messages. Unlike the two respondents, PL (60) that worked for APSEB has learnt computer operations strictly for this purpose. She did not study beyond class ten. Yet, she is able to write sentences, as she was forced to write files and accounts as a senior accountant. She writes sentences often replacing the English words with Telugu, (regional language) and she is successful in conveying the messages and information to her daughter, son in law and three grand children abroad.

“When my husband died 20 years ago, I had to complete class ten in order to get this job. There were no computers during those days and we were using type writers. Today, the entire office is automated and they (government officials) have trained us how to operate this machine. Out of my own interest to communicate with my children, I have learnt how to open an email account.”

Initially she was exchanging information through mails and online chats through yahoo messengers.

“By 2006, I have learnt about video calling using the internet and Iam able to share many things apart from passing simple messages. For example, every summer, we, here in India, prepare mango pickles. There are certain exclusive Indian food varieties. I shall be able to explain all these information to my children staying thousands of mails away from me. It is almost like staying with them as Iam regularly able to check the mails and postings.” She added. Although they are regularly staying in touch with their

children, they have agreed that the network communities are unable to replace the face to face communication.

“No doubt, we are able to update information on daily basis. Yet, this is not equal to talking to them personally. We would be able to enjoy their presence and we are confident when we stay with them. They are also able to cater to our immediate needs when we stay close to them”, observed PL

In families where senior couples are living away from their children, men are dominating the computer operation, while women are playing supportive roles. VGN is a Tamil (language) speaking person, is a native of Tamil Nadu, a neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. He worked and retired as a director at Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO). He retired from his services at the age of 60 and ever since that time he is staying at Sainikpuri, an exclusive residential colony for the retired army personnel at Secunderabad. Spacious and peaceful Sainikpuri colony has several peculiar characteristic features. Double storied building are not permitted here as per the rules and the individual houses are built in spacious 1000 square yards. The colony is known for its lush green and serene locations and its residents are elite, rich and well settled retired army officers. VGN opens the mail box and he stays online for several hours during the day; *“I am not addicted to it like many other friends of mine. I shall check my Gmail and yahoo accounts every day. Whenever I shall come across a message, a reminder that announces a friend’s birthday or wedding anniversary around, I shall scroll back to the Facebook and extend my greetings to them. I browse the Internet extensively for information related to health, Insurance and alternative medicines”, he explained.* His wife HN is a housewife. She does not know basics in computers. Although she is staying away from her children, she does not depend on online communication and she regularly calls her friends or children whenever she wants to exchange information using landline/mobile phone. She is also not happy with HN spending several hours in isolation with the computer machine. *“He spends several hours in front of the machine that made me angry because he does not maintain his schedules. He delays his lunch and does not find time to talk to me. I hate it”, she explained.* VGN observes that web world is limited to those who are educated, elite, and hence its usage is limited, especially among the senior citizens. RS, that worked as subordinate to VGN stays in the same colony, next to his house. According to him, VGN is an activist even at 72 and helps the fellow retired senior persons in the colony by providing assistance during emergencies *“VGN is also acting as colony secretary. He stays in touch with the needy and attends their calls at any time. He takes care of their welfare. They (Colony association) have appointed a young man to pay electricity and phone bills for the aged persons that are unable to complete these tasks themselves. VGN calls 108 (Ambulance service) when somebody is sick and need health services. He is rather fond of meeting people in person”, explained RS.* Unlike VGN, his subordinate. RS is an active user of the Internet and social networking sites like LinkedIn. *“I am pursuing my master’s degree in law after my retirement because I*

am passionate about this profession when I was young. I could complete BL (Bachelor degree in law) in 2010 and have joined PG course only recently. I am acting as company arbitrator and legal consultant for few companies. Professional network communities immensely helped me to stay in touch with the likeminded persons. I am also able to collect course materials with the help of the Internet on topics like 'international law', which is not available as hard copy," he said. RS also stays in touch with his colleagues at DRDO, friends, relatives and children using other virtual network communities. He has showed some of his friends in his network community who are also Tamil speaking people hailed from the state of Tamil Nadu. "Yes, regions, language and the profession play a role in making friends in the cyberspace," He added. For example, KN stays 5 KM away from Sainikpuri, speaks the same language and hails from RS's native place. He is still working as a civil engineer at DRDO. He gets online consultations and suggestions from RS, his predecessor at DRDO. KN came for a breakfast visit at RS's house, while I was collecting data from RS. "We share everything. Right from the issues related to family, disputes, office related tensions and many other things using private mails. We use social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, tagged, live health and UNYK for sharing events, pictures and the information meant for the friends in our network community". When asked about reflecting regional/caste culture in their communication, RS replied in negative. "We do not talk about marriages, recipes, and children. My subordinates that are retired from DRDO and my other friends stay in touch with me via Facebook or LinkedIn and they talk about things related to our activities, profession, hobbies and so on", he says. RS's day schedule is very systematic. He goes for a morning walk at 6AM. His wife prepares coffee for the both by the time he returns from the long walk. He bathes, offers prayers, and takes his breakfast.

"I used to glance through the dailies earlier. Now days, I am reading them online. My wife reads lots of weekly and monthly magazines. She watches noontime soaps and my TV time is from 8PM to 10 PM. I watch news and Tamil TV soap. I am however not very particular about watching soaps. I don't regret missing any of the episodes" he explained. RS's youngest son is a psychiatrist and his daughter in law is a gynecologist. Both of them are very busy practicing at their respective clinics. Their two children Ankit (9) and Archit (7) come to their granny's home straight from school. From 3 PM up to 7 PM until the time their parents come to pick them up, both RS and his wife are busy with the kids.

I found RS's wife KY busy in the kitchen and I have invited her for a discussion. She approached me with a cup of hot filter coffee, unique among Tamil Brahmin (Upper caste, priest or scholarly community) culture. *"I could hardly spare 45 minutes for cycling in the morning. Beyond that I shall not be able to spare time for my personal interests. 30 years ago, when I married RS, he told me that he expects his wife to dedicate her entire time for the family. I am a true house wife with no time for any other personal hobbies."* she said. She did not say these things in a complaining tone to me and uttered these words in the presence of RS. When asked to comment whether gender related domestic activities are limiting

women from taking active part in the virtual sphere, RS replied that *“You are aware, in our community, we do not allow the maid servants to cook for us. It is not that I am unable to afford a cook. My wife takes part in Bhajans (Community devotional singing) and attends classes to learn Indian classical music twice during the week. She is not showing any interest in browsing the net. She finds time only to peep through the pictures and videos when posted on my social network sites”*. RS’s eldest son stays in USA. Whenever there are any postings and events on his side, he calls his wife to go through them. *“Recently, my grandson attained ‘President’s Award’ for excellence in his studies in USA. They have posted these details on social media. My son regularly posts photos and videos for me and his mum”* says RS.

Unlike KY, her elder sister that stays in Bangalore (South Indian Metro & capital to Karnataka, a neighboring state of AP) posts regularly on RS’s Facebook pages and she is an active online browser.

“My sister spends lot of time on downloading devotional music from the Internet as she is a classical singer. She maintains her community of singers. She talks to me over a phone. Though I hold a postgraduate degree in political science, I did not take interest in computers because I am pre-occupied. My husband guides and helps me in navigating through the websites whenever there are any important things to do.” Dr. Dy is a woman in her early 80s is a very active Internet user and she is managing an NGO for aged, 45 KM away from the Hyderabad city. RS’s Daughter in law, who is a gynecologist, visits this NGO twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday. HV, RS’s daughter in law came to her in law’s home to pick up her kids, took me to Dr. Dy, staying at Kukatpalli area for more live interaction. Dr. Dy benefited a lot from her online community. Lean, grey haired Dr. Dy welcomed me with cheer and has answered to my queries. *“I am running a home 45 KM away from here, at a very nominal price for economically poor senior citizens that are deserted by their kids. For me Internet is very useful device in contacting people every day. I stay in touch with the healthcare providers, nutritionists and psychiatrists, whose services are essential to run my institute”*. She said. She relies on mailing for formal communication with her donors and the other health providers. The seniors at the home do not have access to computers so that building community networks is ruled out for her. Dr. Dy maintains a Facebook account and she uses it for building relationships with her friends and colleagues, who are doctors too. *“I have remained as a spinster and the entire society is my family. I do not spend much time on the Internet making friendships. I do browse the Internet for information related to our inmates. For example, there are exclusive forums online for the elderly people in India that provides services on food and diet, health, fitness, legal help and entertainment. I am unable to create one such thing for my inmates as they are not computer literates. The elite and wealthy seniors with assured sum at the end of their retirement can make use of such platforms. This offers several advantages to them”*. She browses websites for extracting information on health, fitness, Yoga and naturopathy (Ayurveda). She also browses the Internet for e-books and material.

Unlike the Internet activities described above, KMR explores the websites for fun. Playing online games is his weakness. KMP (62) is working for a private firm that manufactures high density valves as a Finance Manager. He is in touch with his friends and family members, which includes his sister-in-law (His wife's sister) that plays Farmville. He purchases farm lands, tractors and the other hi-tech machinery on virtual game and cultivates grapes. His profits are available to him in the form of points. He can use these points to extend his property further and can become rich. *"Irrespective of age, many are there in my community. There is a popular local film hero in my group and I take this game very seriously"*, explains KMP. His office hours are not suitable for him to play this game. Hence he rushes home in the afternoon under the guise of lunch and plays this game. *"We have to take wise decisions while playing (clicking) these games. I may earn profit today but the same may be vanished the next day. I shall regularly talk to my sister in law and she also consults me while taking any major decision"* he said. His wife doesn't like this game at all as she feels that he may inject this fanatic behavior to his children as well. *"I have learnt through his colleagues that he is turning restless whenever he is unable to return to the game at regular intervals. I have observed my husband talking over phone or in person for hours with my sister about this game, the points they are gaining or the loss they have incurred. As if it is an important part of our daily life, these two discuss about it for hours. Even my sister's husband is annoyed of her behavior. I have been asking him to discontinue this game. I shall take him to a psychiatrist for counseling if he does not listen to me"* she explained. Among the 15 respondents that participated in this study, PGK (62) is unique for various reasons. He hails from Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh and works for an international NGO. PGK remained bachelor and makes the best use of his network community forums for advice, counseling, consulting, for therapy and for what not? *"At present 4985 members are there in my Facebook community"* while opening his site, he observed. I am (the researcher) also part of his network now. *"I am thankful to innumerable number of people for their trust on me for consulting on a regular basis"*, he said. *"I keep my network site open throughout the day from morning 8AM till I go to bed from Monday to Saturday. I appreciate the people's ability in communicating, posting innovative things on my FB page. I will consider myself as a humble person as I do not have tremendous capacity for changing attitudes and solving problems. I however want to make the best use of this life (his own capacities as a human being) as a tool to listen to others and to preach what I have learnt out of my experience"* he said. PGK is the sixth child in a family of ten and had to struggle even to complete his school final. He studied privately to complete his bachelor's degree and PG. His life has taught him valuable lessons and he wishes to fulfill his duties as a human by passing on the knowledge using variety of tools including pictures, cartoons, short stories, sayings, morals, and philosophical notes. He takes the support of great Indian classics like The '*Bhagavad-Gita*' while interpreting worldly affairs. He addresses women as 'Amma' (the mother). One can trace many shades of PGK from his interactions.

Let us take few excerpts from his conversations. He is a soother when he drives home a moral to his friends.

Panchatantram

A). *our eyes become blind when fate is ready to strike its blow. A story from Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharma* There was a city named Mahlaaropya in the Southern Region.... Like · · Share · about an hour ago · 2 people like this.

B). “It is not our own intelligence but the foolishness of others that save us quite often, a story from Panchatantram of Vishnu Sharma

In a forest there lived a lion that was more than middle-aged and would prefer to sit at ease somewhere and catch hold of the prey that came nearby by applying whatever grey cells that remained in his brain. Of course he had, as usual with people of this age, info...See More

C). Another story from Panchatantram of Vishnu Sharma

In a jungle area there was a huge pond which housed lots and lots of aquatic creatures. There were Fish of all hues, frogs, and crabs See more... Like, Share: 2 Hours ago

PGK invokes positive spirit by posting sayings like:

A). *A day spent without laughter is a day wasted...*

Keep smiling! Cheers!!

Like · Share · 54 minutes ago ·

Wonderful info...! :)

B). *Failure does not mean I'm a failure;*

It does mean I have not yet succeeded.

Failure does not mean I have accomplished nothing;

It does mean I have learned something.

..See More

Like · Share · about an hour ago ·

5 people like this.

Piece of advice from PGK

a) “Tears can be deceptive”

b) *Ego sense is an illusion. When you realize the Truth you see yourself everywhere. You have manifested as the entire universe and all the things in it. There is nothing but Brahman. This is the message of Vedanta. This is the exact Truth which you have to realize." Swami Ramdas*

[Alan Jacobs](#)

Like · [Share](#) · [20 hours ago](#) ·

[7 people](#) like this.

Health information:

A). *Dr Stephen Mak treats terminal ill cancer patients by "un-orthodox" way and many patients recovered. Before he used solar energy to clear the illnesses of his patients. He believes on natural healing in the body against illnesses. See his article below. It is one of the strategies to heal cancer. As of late, my success rate in curing cancer is about 80%. Cancer patients ...See More*

Like · · Share · 19 hours ago

4 People like this

B) *Heart Attack Procedures (It is not a joke).*

A serious note about heart attacks

Women should know that not every heart attack symptom is going to be the left arm hurting. Be aware of intense pain in the jaw line. You may never have the first chest pain.

Give up Para chintana (thinking about others) and cultivate Paramatmachintana (thinking about God). This is the true spiritual practice (Sadhana). Do not be carried away by the worldly pleasures. Take to the sacred path and sanctify your time by chanting the Divine Name. There is no need to allocate a specific time or place for Namasmarana (reciting Lord's name). You can do it wherever you a...See More

Philosophical PGK

A). BALANCE SHEET OF LIFE:

Our Birth is our Opening Balance!

Our Death is our Closing Balance!

Our Prejudiced Views are our Liabilities.

..See More

Like · · Share · 2 hours ago ·

9 people like this. 3 shares

B). How can one have a vision of God?

Bhagavan: Seeing God implies that he is not there now but will come later, is it not? That which appears and disappears is not permanent. Can one place faith in that which is impermanent? Is it not better to abide in God, instead of merely seeing him? Self-abidance is what one should seek, not visions. It is only when the ego is merged in its source, the Heart that true knowledge of one's identity with God will dawn.
Alan Jacobs · · Like.. Share-20 hours ago 4 people like this

He does not believe in the fact that isolation is part of old age and that is the reason why the elderly people are stinging to the online activities. He has shared lot of information on the way members in his group could solve certain personal issues. He has personal association with many philosophical and spiritual bodies like 'Satsang', a forum for spiritual debates. He talks about yoga, meditation and the other indigenous methods to maintain the physical and the mental balance.

Conclusion

Online experiences of the senior citizens have provided great insights on the way the senior citizens are making use of the Internet and the network communities to fulfill their various needs; Globalization, revolution in the field of information and the communication technologies could bring enormous changes in the urban, middle class Indian families, where the migration of young adults in the families creating a void among the senior adults that are increasingly embracing the modern means of communication to fill their psychological and emotional needs. Virtual communication is an urban phenomenon in India and Online communication and interaction is not wide spread among the Indian senior citizens due to low penetration levels, lack of access to technology, lack of financial independence, dependency on children, low computer literacy. This study could unearth two types of internet users among the senior citizens in India, namely the primary and secondary users; senior citizens with a decent literacy level and enough financial back up are keen in learning and adapting to the new technologies. They are not only making the best use of this platform for exchange of information by emails and extracting information through search engines, but also using it innovatively for live discussions, talks, photo sharing, sharing videos, and creating thematic events with the members of their community. They are capable of navigating through the network communities themselves. The secondary users are those who are not proficient in English and computer operations and they are able to communicate through the internet communities with the help of their children, neighbors, friends and relatives. Online or the virtual sphere among the seniors in India is male dominated where men could demonstrate proven abilities in dealing with the technology. They are able to use it for knowledge transfer, information sharing, and extraction of information, apart from building relations, using the network communities. Although educated women, established in their

profession are using it for formal information sharing and knowledge sharing, majority women are using it mainly for building and maintaining social relations. Both the primary and secondary users (senior citizens) are happy for one reason that they are able to communicate quickly and effectively at a very low cost and they could conquer time and space with the help of technology by communicating across the continents instantaneously. If women are primarily using these devices to address the issues related to family, men are using it for acquiring new skills, updating knowledge, networking the colleagues, friends and for seeking /providing expert opinion. The digital divide that exists between the rural and urban and male VS Female and the rich VS poor, apart from the literate VS illiterate in general in India is reflected even among the senior citizens of this country, limiting several million users away from the benefits of the ICT revolution. Though the spread of mobile phones in India is opening up new avenues in overcoming the issues like low internet penetration and access in rural areas, ability to own and operate smart phones is still limiting a vast section of population.

Despite these limitations, the popularity for this new medium of interactive communication is a boon for millions of senior citizens, whose number is on rise and an increasing number of seniors are eagerly opting it for variety of personal, professional, financial and social uses.

References

1. Central Statistics Office, GOI, 2011: Situation Analysis of the Elderly in India, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India, http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/elderly_in_india.pdf
2. Cohena E and Litwin H (2004) Elder participation in cyberspace: A qualitative analysis of Israeli retirees, Journal of Aging Studies 18: 385–398, www.elsevier.com/locate/jaging
3. Eastman JK and Iyer R (2004) The elder's uses and attitudes towards the Internet. Journal of Consumer Marketing 21: 208 – 220, DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/07363760410534759>
4. Estatindia (2014) Social Media Users & usage in India. Statuesque report <http://www.slideshare.net/Vicks18/social-media-users-usage-in-india-2014-report>
5. Jones S and Fox S (2009) Generations Online in 2009, Pew Internet and American life project <http://pewinternet.org/trends.asp>

6. Juznic P, [Blazic M](#) , [Mercun M](#), [Plestenjak B](#), [Majcenovic D](#) (2006) "Who says that old dogs cannot learn new tricks? A survey of internet/web usage among seniors". *New Library World* 107: 332 – 345
7. India Broad Band Forum (IBF) (2008) Some Statistics about Internet Users in India <http://www.indiabroadband.net/india-broadband-telecom-news/11169-some-statistics-about-internet-users-india.html>
8. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IMRB International, Internet in India 2013
9. Kanayama T (2003) Online Ethnographic Research on the Experience of Japanese Elderly People. *New Media & Society* , DOI:10.1177/1461444803005002007 .
10. Knechte GR (2002) Seniors and Computers - Mining the Internet's "Grandmother Load, Global action on Aging, <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/us/compo.htm>
11. Loges W and Jung JY (2001) Exploring the Digital Divide. *Internet Connectedness and Age Communication Research* 28: 536-562.
12. Mukherjee D (2011) Information and Communication Technologies for the Protection of older adults in India. *Asia Pacific Tech Monitor*
13. Raine L (2012) Senior Citizens and Digital Technology, Pew Internet & American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/09/15/senior-citizens-and-digital-technology/>, Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project 2006-2008
14. Shah (2011) Social Media in India in 2011 & 2012 <http://www.imediconnection.in/article/752/Digital/Internet/social-media-in-india-in-2011-and-2012.html>
15. Simply 360 23 Interesting Social Media Statistics and Facts about India <http://simplify360.com/blog/23-interesting-social-media-statistics-and-facts-about-india/>
16. Sreekumar T (2008) Cyber kiosks and dilemmas of social inclusion in rural India. *Sage journals* <http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/29/6/869.short>

17. The Economic Times (2008) Senior citizens driving Internet usage, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2006-03-03/news/27431572_1_senior-citizens-internet-users-internet-population
18. WHO (2001) Health statistics and information systems. World Health Survey <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/survey/ageingdefnolder/en/>
19. Zickuhr K (2014) Older adults and technology. Pew Research centre <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/29/older-adults-and-technology/>

Questionnaire

1. When did you get familiarity with the Internet? And how do you view this device/tool? How do you use it?
2. Are you familiar with the social networking sites on the virtual sphere? If so what are the popular sites in which you become a member?
3. How many persons are there in your network and what % of your friends, relatives, and acquaintance connected to you in the 60+ age group in it?
4. Please give few details like your daily routine that may allow me to visualize your online activity. (This includes how do you spend your day, what is your profession, family size and few glimpses of your profile. You may be a retired person/house wife/grandmother communicating with your grand children etc).
5. What is your experience in interacting with others using the social media?
6. As per your knowledge/experience. What type of differences have you noticed in the responses/postings/questions/problems posted by aged people by
 - a) Gender (Male/Female)
 - b) Social status
 - c) Economic status
 - d) Cultural (religion, education, etc)

(The general perception is that the media usage may vary according to gender, religion they follow, age, and economic status of the respondent. Kindly share with me if there are any unique or special/most memorable incidents you have experienced with the segments mentioned above. For example, a senior

citizen might have been greatly relieved of their trouble or an old aged person got some solution to some of his/her problems etc.)

7. How often your senior (60+ age group) friends respond to your queries?
8. Do you have any rare and special memories on relationships made via social media? I mean to say that did it help in addressing the needs of your senior group members?
9. According to you, how does the network community help aged people?
 - A) Psychologically (Affected with grief, isolation, despair, loss etc)
 - b) Emotionally (Looking for your mail regularly for some good word, support)
 - C) Culturally (Are they able to share information on food, festivals, functions etc..?)
 - d) Physically (health/fitness, advice on curing etc, insurance....)
 - e) Economically (Information on part time jobs, savings, deposits, realty, special (economic) befits for the aged, govt schemes, policies like pension etc)
10. Can you share any specific experiences of your own or your friends that are benefitted in the above mentioned aspects due to regular interaction in social media groups, including online games?
11. Do you agree that social media cannot replace face to face interaction and there are possibilities of fake identities, fraudulence etc? Are you exposed to any such incidents during your interaction in the virtual world?